Mentorship Matters

At every stage of a scientific career, the influence of good mentors can make all the difference. Although we are not a dedicated educational institution, CCR makes training the next generation of scientists a priority. Currently, CCR is home to approximately 760 postdoctoral, research, and clinical fellows, 190 pre-doctoral students, and an average of 350 summer students pursuing training in multiple areas ranging from basic research at the laboratory bench to translational research that may ultimately bring these discoveries to the bedside.

(Photo: B. Branson)

Robert Wiltrout, Ph.D.

Doctoral students find their way into CCR laboratories through several mechanisms. In "A Special Relationship," we learn that 32 graduate students have trained in CCR laboratories through a program, which originated between the NIH and Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the U.K. Each of the scientists interviewed for this story have pursued diverse career trajectories, but all look back on their experience at CCR as formative.

Chanelle Case-Borden, Ph.D., explains in this installment of our "In Conversation" series, how the NIH Graduate Partnerships Program allowed her to pursue her doctoral research under Thomas Ried, M.D., Senior Investigator, in CCR's Genetics Branch. Case-Borden continues to work as a postdoctoral fellow in CCR's Experimental Immunology Branch, under the guidance of Dinah Singer, Ph.D. Moreover, she is already "giving back" as a mentor to postbaccalaureate fellows interested in M.D./Ph.D. programs.

Mark Smyth, Ph.D., Senior Scientist in the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Brisbane, Australia, traces a strong influence on his career to the mentors and colleagues he gained through his postdoctoral fellowship in what was then the NCI's Biological Response Modifiers Program in Frederick, Md. In "It Takes a Village," he describes the collaborative atmosphere of those days as one he has tried to replicate throughout his career as a key driver of success.

As noted in "Bacterial Regulation: Past, Present, and Future," even high school and college students have the opportunity to spend summers experiencing scientific research first hand. Indeed, it was due to these budding scientists, that Susan Gottesman, Ph.D., Co-Chief of CCR's Laboratory of Molecular Biology, was able to discover some of the first small RNAs responsible for regulating the bacterial stress response.

Mentoring the next generation of scientists is, thus, not only an honor and a responsibility, it is also the path to being a productive researcher. As Gottesman's postdoctoral fellow, Daniel Schu, Ph.D., remarks, "I think it is [Susan's] mentoring that has really fueled her continued success. She has two or three students, from high school, college or beyond, coming through the lab every year, either for the summer or as postbacs for a year or two. She allows them to take on their own projects, build confidence in their techniques, and really get a taste for how science is done."

While we all hope that the problem of cancer will be solved in our lifetimes, we know that new challenges will remain. Therefore, CCR is committed to laying a strong foundation for the next generation of biomedical researchers at every level, without which the future of biomedical research and solutions to emerging health threats would be imperiled.